

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Vice-Chancellor's GENDER EQUALITY FUND Final Report 2020

Report Title:

Moving Western to "Employer of Choice for Parents:" developing new campus-based childcare options

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Recommendations

This project builds on the foundational recommendations that the Engaged Parent Network (EPN) provided in the 2019 VC GEF project informed by an appreciative inquiry examining the lived experiences of return to work from parental leave. This new project has focused on moving Western to an employer of choice for parents. The following strategy initiatives stem from both the final core findings of the 2020-2021 project and ongoing discussions when identifying and addressing gender inequities within the institution from academic and professional staff and student parents who are part of the Engaged Parent Network.

Listed below are suggestions to help improve Western culture by increasing the visibility of parenthood in the workplace, and to improve the experience of staff returning to work after parental leave. The recommendations relate to additional child-minding initiatives on Western campuses. Consultation was also undertaken with key stakeholders to inform these recommendations.

1. Piloting a Kids Holiday Program @ Western

Holiday programs would be a valuable resource for many Western parents, helping staff work while offering children a safe place to play and learn. This can provide practical benefits for children of all ages, depending on the type of holiday program on offer.

We recommend piloting holiday programs on 2-3 campuses simultaneously under the branding of “Western innovation campus” to be operated by a third-party provider such as the YMCA. This could be held on two trial campuses to give primary and high school students exposure to attend one - two week long holiday camps offering key activities aligned with Western’s strengths such as STEM, and sports and recreation. Successful implementation will provide opportunities to generate income from this scheme. The holiday programs could run during January, April, July or October school holidays as these are the time periods that parents struggle most to find care for their children. Sport, Science and Robotic camps are popular and could be provided on the university grounds. Such programs could run on Kingswood, Campbelltown and/or Parramatta campuses, which are located within the highest population growth LGAs. An initial pilot holiday program offered in the short-term by a third party could help gather feedback on how to

improve and brand such ongoing service provision. If the holiday program proves to be a success, an in-house vacation care program with the benefits of government subsidies could be made available.

2. Providing Drop-In Services @ Western

The offering of drop-in services will enable childcare on an unscheduled, irregular, 'any time of day' basis. There is an increased demand for drop-in services post-pandemic. Having such a service at Western was highly desired by our participants in support of greater flexibility and autonomy. Flexible childcare options are helpful to staff in managing their work and personal responsibilities (time flexibility, location flexibility, breastfeeding support on campus, scheduling flexibility, appropriate funding to backfill positions during leave and phased return). In addition, conversations with the student parent union confirmed that student parents would find such a service valuable during exam periods, attending class sessions, working in groups, lab work, or other commitments to which they cannot bring their children and require flexible child minding assistance. At Western such revenue-generating models could be run by educators and staffed by Western Early Childhood students to provide student work-integrated learning and placement opportunities. Despite the financial investment required with initial setup and ongoing operation, these childcare options are highly desirable to staff and students as they support the flexible work arrangements that have become the new norm post-pandemic. This initiative could reflect a 'students supporting students' approach where the workforce is drawn from the relevant disciplines and campus-based strengths at Western Sydney University.

3. Develop Child Friendly campuses @ Western:

Western could consider rolling out "child friendly" campuses – a first in the Australian Higher Education (HE) sector. Managed by a Western 'Kids on Campus' Coordinator who is part of the Office of Equity and Diversity Team, this strategy could include the creation and piloting of child friendly playgrounds and library corners at Western campuses in partnership with, and for, the local community and working parents and students. To ensure initiatives are valued and site specific for each campus the Western 'Kids on Campus' Coordinator could work collaboratively across campuses with each Campus

Provost/Campus life committee to accept bids/suggestions for use from students/staff and community. The Coordinator will also draw in urban planning and industrial design students to work under guidance from the committee and Western Finances and Resources in the implementation of initiatives. This consultation process with staff and students will provide a unique opportunity for student experiential learning, community engagement and staff/student consultation.

Note, the recommendations above are based solely on the scoping study that was limited by time and resources, not to mention participants' resistance to engage in field research during the pandemic in 2020/21. The above suggests affordable, occasional childcare options for staff that Western could pursue and implement in the short-term to become a family-friendly employer. We recommend a more extensive study to be conducted in the future to explore the long-term viability and feasibility of appropriate business models to be used by Western. Collaboration with the School of Business is recommended. The work-integrated learning units could be one option to obtain in-house free advice and consultation on business plans outlining the operational, financial, marketing, and administrative side of introducing such childcare options in the long term.

Executive Summary

This report highlights the main findings from the VC Gender Equity project for "Moving Western to 'Employer of Choice for Parents' : developing new campus-based childcare options". Research has shown that parents returning to work have to juggle significant family and work commitments after the first child's birth, creating substantial work-family conflict. Our 2019 gender equity research indicated that Western staff who are parents would value more flexible forms of childcare on campus. The lack of affordable 'drop-in' crèche (occasional) style care on campuses was highlighted with the absence of holiday and vacation care programs. This was noted as a problem for Higher Degree Research (HDR) students and casual staff, who have irregular hours on campus. International students reported being forced to spend the majority of their PhD stipend on formal ongoing childcare enrolment simply to ensure they can access childcare on an *ad hoc* basis.

The aim of this project was to explore the feasibility of introducing affordable drop in care facilities and vacation/ school holiday programs at Western. These potential initiatives would provide additional innovative childcare support to address the post-pandemic needs of staff and students. This project sought to explore options and how to harness the significant expertise already at Western.

This mixed-method study used an online survey to explore staff needs (academic, professional, casual and ongoing) as well as potential future staff (HDR students) and current students (UG and PG) regarding drop in care facilities, before and after school care, holiday programs and vacation care programs on campus. In addition, external stakeholders providing childcare services were purposively sampled to take part in semi-structured interviews to inform the design of a feasible model of flexible childcare for implementation at Western. Internal stakeholders were represented by the Early Learning Centres (WSU ELCs). A tabulated matrix was developed to identify gaps that Western could fill to maintain a degree of uniqueness, attractiveness and competitiveness in the higher education sector. Suggestions to help improve Western culture by increasing the visibility of parenthood in the workplace, and to improve the experience of staff returning to work after parental leave are given. The recommendations relate to additional child-minding initiatives on Western campuses.

Itemised Budget Expenditure

Total funded amount \$ **4903**

Date	Activity / Item	Cost (GST incl.)
November 2020 – May 2021	Research Assistant (Mrs. Sandra Marjanovic) who supported the team with the following tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survey validation• Survey distribution and analysis• Assistance with interviews• General administration of the project• Transcription of the interviews 75 hrs @ \$55.71p/h (Level 5.1 rate as of 2019) including 15.9% oncosts	\$ 4178.25
Total expenditure:		\$4178.25

Research Report

Background

Previous research has highlighted the considerable strain and institutional biases experienced by academic women as they balance work and family commitments. Academics who are primary caregivers (overwhelmingly women) publish less and are less likely to get promoted. Academic women are also placed in a position of greater disadvantage in career development (Fitzenberger et al., 2016). Research has shown that mothers returning to work have to juggle significant family and work commitments after the first child's birth, creating substantial work-family conflict (WFC). This can lead to a major reassessment of work preferences among female employees (Robinson et al., 2016). This is keenly felt when academics face gaps in publishing, lost industry partnerships or outdated skills and knowledge with a career disruption. Returning to work after parental leave is challenging and maintaining an upward career trajectory can be highly competitive (McAlpine, 2015, Browning, 2017). Consequently, the pandemic has compounded the pre-existing gender disparity around women and work (Ross, 2020; Stadnyk and Black, 2020).

What has not been clearly understood is if the transition back to work results in dissonance between the realities of parenthood and the expectation of staff professional roles. Our 2019 study which used an appreciative inquiry methodology found that participants merged their dual roles as parents and workers in a climate of low disclosure. These participants recommended that Western Sydney University (WSU) could do more to make parenthood more visible and create a family and child-friendly work environment. Funding for this project was received after the first lockdown in NSW (begin-mid 2020), hence the data collected in this pilot study reflects both the pre-and post pandemic opinions of the workforce.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the higher education sector has embraced the widespread adoption of remote work models with hybrid workplace options empowering employees to experience greater flexibility. However, these available flexible work options call for accommodation of non-standard child-minding and

childcare initiatives to suit the new life-work balance. This need also aligns with our 2019 gender equity research, which indicated that Western staff who are parents would value more flexible forms of childcare on campus. The lack of affordable 'drop-in' crèche (occasional) style care on campuses was highlighted together with the absence of holiday and vacation care programs. This was noted to be a particular problem for Higher Degree Research (HDR) students and casual staff, who have irregular hours on campus. International students reported being forced to spend the majority of their PhD stipend on formal ongoing childcare enrolment, simply to ensure they can access childcare on an *ad hoc* basis.

Full-time staff could also benefit from childcare flexibility due to the new norm of flexible post-pandemic work environments. The difficulty accessing available holiday/vacation care is another issue that has often resulted in staff/students having to bring children into the workplace during school holidays. However, with ongoing pandemic restrictions, this is generally not feasible. Many organisations are implementing practices and strategies to support and retain working parents. However, the question remains how employers can facilitate better the transition and impact that raising children has on their employees. In particular, in the post-pandemic era, child-minding obligations and the demands of an increasingly competitive higher education workplace are evident in research, teaching, and increased workload. This will likely create further tensions between attaining work goals and meeting family responsibilities.

Our study aims to offer solutions that can be implemented at an institutional level, such as introducing affordable drop-in care facilities and providing Western vacation/ holiday care programs. These services would not be intended to replace existing Western Early Learning Centres, but instead enhance innovative childcare support to address the needs of staff and students through the pandemic and beyond. This initiative is likely to enhance Western's aim of being both an employer of choice for parents and maintaining its position as a gender equitable university.

Providing alternative post-pandemic on-campus child-minding options at Western could help normalise parenthood in today's 'new norm' and flexible work environment in the

higher education sector. It may also signal equal opportunity to all staff members by addressing issues, attitudes, practices, and structures that negatively impact gender-based workforce participation and progression.

COVID-19 has affected the higher education sector resulting in universities moving to 'emergency online education' delivery mode; providing additional assistance to students; embracing a modified conduct of research, and tenured staff facing job insecurity. University management was compelled to reinvent campus operations (Blackmore, 2020; Marinoni et al. 2020; Tamrat and Teferra, 2020). The pandemic has had an impact on career cycles, progression, and work practice in Higher Education. In particular, the effect on parents with children has intensified the challenges. The increased stress levels of parenting during the pandemic made the struggles of everyday parenthood visible across industries; with parents having to juggle a new norm of a work-life balance during lockdowns (Cameron et al. 2020; Chu et al. 2020). During lockdowns, children could not access playgrounds, engage in campus-based schooling, organized sports, or recreational activities, which had potential effects on child and parent mental health and well-being (Brown et al. 2020; Westrupp et al. 2020; O'Sullivan et al. 2020). Within academia, it was observed that mothers were striving to be active scholars and teachers during the pandemic while simultaneously attempting to keep their children occupied (Guy & Arthur, 2020).

Study aims and objectives

This study explored the feasibility of introducing affordable drop-in care facilities and Western vacation/ school holiday programs. Not intended to replace existing Western Early Learning Centres, these initiatives are proposed to provide additional innovative childcare support to address the post-pandemic needs of staff and students. These initiatives have the potential to help brand Western as the "employer of choice for parents" and harness the significant expertise already at Western.

Method

Study Design & Data Collection

This mixed-method study explored staff needs (academic, professional, casual and ongoing) as well as potential future staff (HDR students) and current students (UG and PG) regarding drop in care facilities, before and after school care, holiday programs and vacation care programs on campus. Despite providing the same service to families, holiday and vacation care programs differ based on subsidies available to parents. An online survey was conducted in addition to interviews with key stakeholders. The inclusion criteria for the online survey were parents working at Western, and who have returned to work following parental leave in the last 5 years. Staff and students were invited to complete the survey (qualtrics) via an email distributed by The Office of Human Resources at Western. The survey was also distributed via Yammer, the EPN network and the WSU student parent union. The online survey collected demographic data (age, postcode, gender, marital status, role at Western) and data on childcare needs and how caring commitments may have impacted work. The survey was distributed May to June 2021.

In addition, external stakeholders who provide childcare services were purposively sampled to participate in semi-structured interviews to inform the design of a feasible model of flexible childcare for implementation at Western. Internal stakeholders were represented by the Early Learning Centres (WSU ELCs). Interviews were also held with selected representatives from external organisations, who have previously implemented similar schemes. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and via Zoom, were approximately 45 minutes in duration. All interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed verbatim and de-identified.

Secondary data sourced from, publicly available university websites in NSW were also analysed to understand their provision of childcare options to their staff. A Table was developed to identify gaps that Western could fill to maintain uniqueness, attractiveness and competitiveness in the higher education sector.

Findings

Survey results: The needs of Western parents

In total, 110 participants completed the survey (Participant characteristics – see Appendix A, Questions around Childcare services – see Appendix B). Forty-one percent reported having two children and 35% had one child under 12 years they care for. Forty-three percent had one child aged 23 months or younger, 13% had one between 24 and 35 months of age, 28% between 3 and 5 years, and 34% had one child between 6 and 12 years (Figure 1 and 2). Only 11% of participants were currently using Western Sydney University childcare services for their youngest child (Figure 3). When asked which problems participants were facing in arranging for childcare, over 30% reported that most programs were already filled or relatives and friends were unavailable, and over 20% reported having inability to find childcare services that suit work and/or family schedule (Figure 4).

Figure 1: Number of children among participants by age group

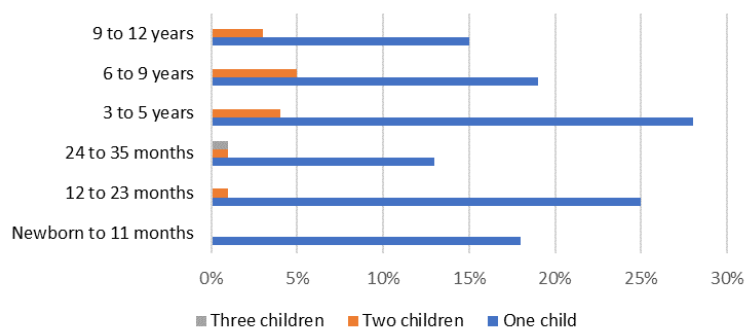


Figure 2. Youngest child age of participants (n = 110)

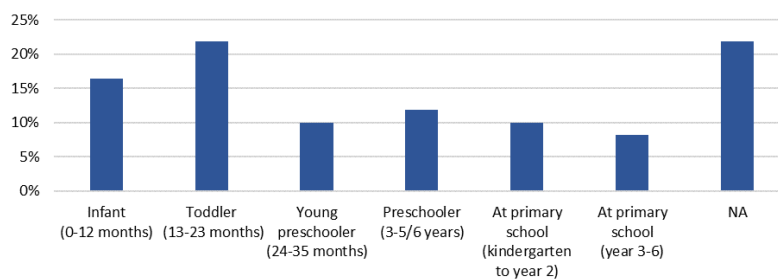


Figure 3. Primary type of care used for youngest child

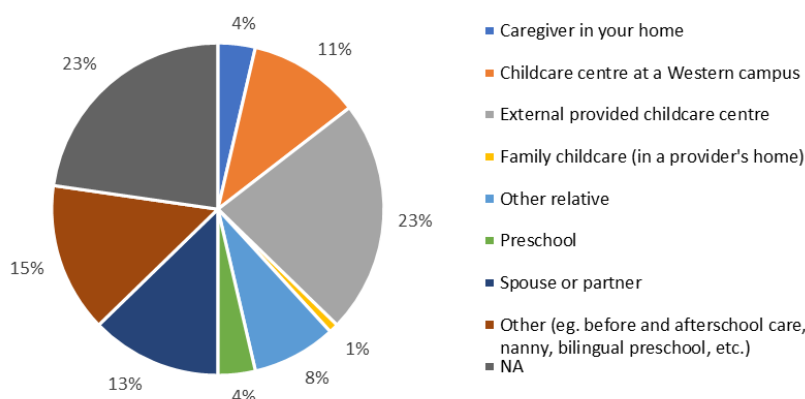
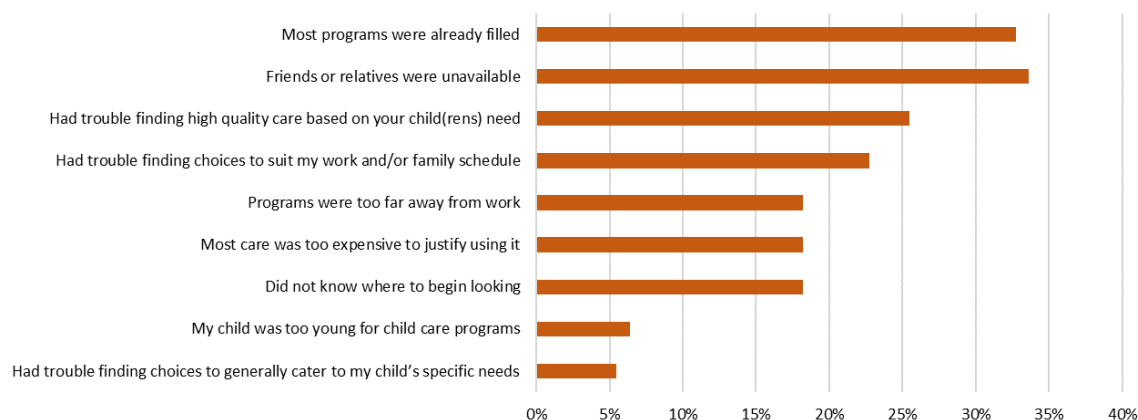


Figure 4. Problems in arranging childcare



Potential reasons for changing childcare arrangements were cost of care (>50%), location of care (>40%), and hours childcare is available (>30%) (Figure 5). Twenty percent of participants also reported to have arrived late to work on one to ten days in the past year due to problems with childcare arrangements, 17% missed work (Figure 6 and 7). When asked about specific childcare services, 75% would likely use holiday and vacation care programs in the future, 72% would use on-site emergency back-up care, 67% would use drop-in services on campus for short periods of time such as attending meetings/ teaching a class/ performing experiments in the lab, and 51% would use afterschool care programs near or on campus (Figure 8). Eighty-five percent of participants reported needing childcare that is available between 6am and 8am and 73% needed childcare after 5pm (Figure 9). Seventy-three percent reported they would be

more productive at work and 41% would work more hours if childcare was available and affordable on or near campus (Figure 10).

Figure 5. Reasons for changing childcare

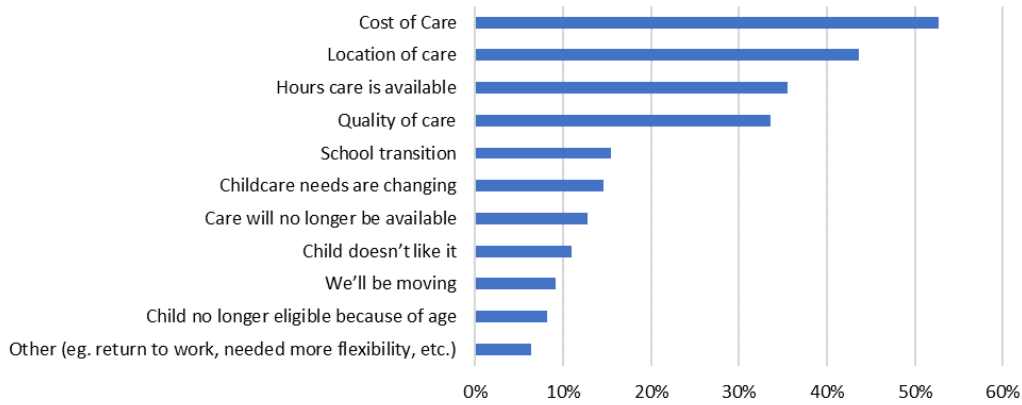


Figure 6. Number of days participants arrived late to work due to...

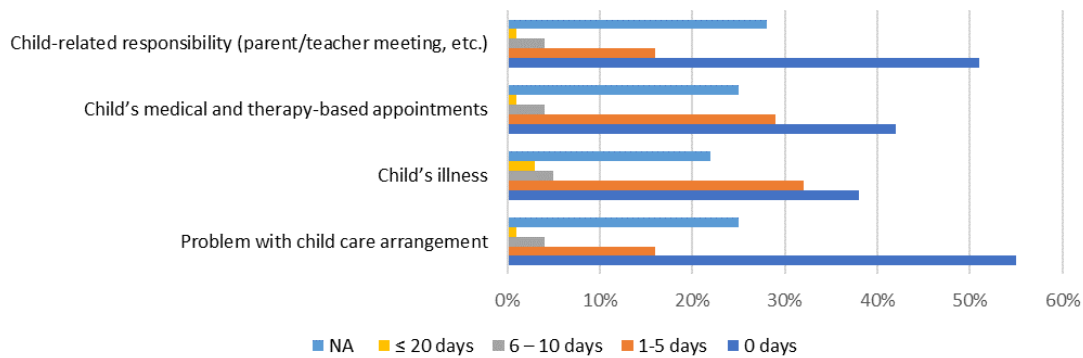


Figure 7. Number of days participants missed work due to...

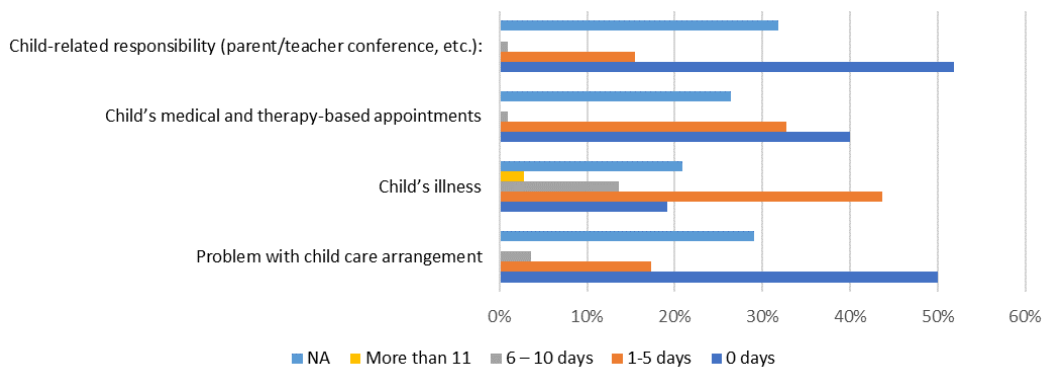


Figure 8. How likely participants would use proposed childcare services

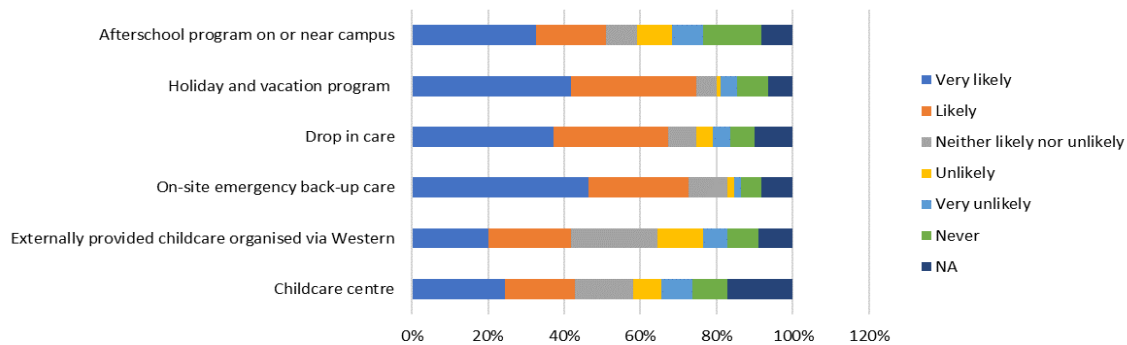


Figure 9. Earliest and latest start times required for childcare

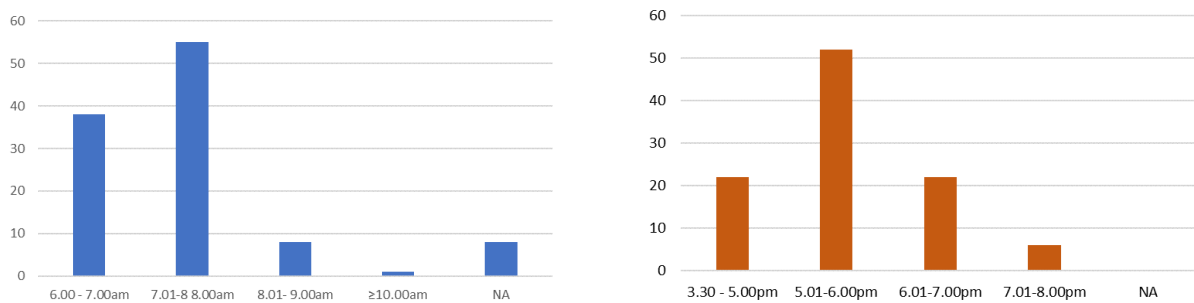
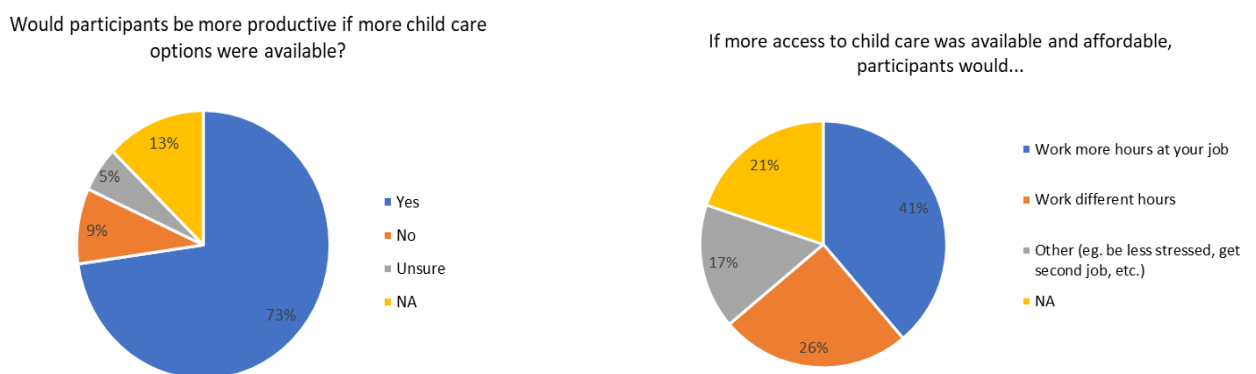


Figure 10. Likelihood of increased productivity if more childcare options were available



Having these additional care options on campus and readily available suggest minor emergencies may translate into fewer absences for parents in the workplace as well as address increased flexible parental needs in the post-pandemic era. Western is likely to

benefit by enabling parents to maintain momentum in productivity and, as a result, sustain an upward career trajectory. Parents knowing that their children are safe and close may reduce the overall stress levels and allow staff to be more task focused. Academic, professional and student-parent retention returning post-career break; would have more flexibility, which is likely to result in less staff turnover overall and increased institutional support to meet staff career trajectories and progression. Hence, additional childminding services for children that cannot be left home alone, could lead to acknowledgement and visibility of the parental status at Western. In addition, such initiatives contribute to providing a more supportive, family-friendly workplace, enhancing culture and the visibility of children on campus while building Western's brand as the "employer of choice for parents".

Interview results:

In total, five stakeholders participated in the interviews. Two individuals were operating vacation care services, one was operating holiday programs, and one provider offered drop-in childcare services. The WSU Early Learning Childcare Centres was also interviewed for this project. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The results below are presented based on type of care provision: 1) vacation care; 2) before and after school care; 3) drop-in care.

1. Vacation Care & Holiday Programs

1.1. Vacation care programs / holiday programs – Description

The vacation and holiday program operators reported that their vacation care service locations offered several programs for children, including incursions and excursions each week. Holiday programs focused on sports activities for children. Enrolment in vacation care or holiday care was casually, daily, and costs would depend on the program offered. Opening times were usually between 6.30am and 6.30pm for vacation care and 9.30am to 3.00pm for holiday care. The government does not subsidise holiday care, vacation care is subsidised.

“...And there’s a different cost for each day depending on what is on. Monday we will work out the costs of the incursions and excursions...and then we do a 12 hour day....so six thirty to six thirty for the children...” (Provider No 1)

“...So looking to bring a bit of, you know, fitness, mindfulness, wellbeing, looking at nutrition and a whole lot of things...” (Provider No 2)

“...we do a lot of games and activities...holiday programs are now primarily around different sports, like basketball, volleyball and soccer, where we basically do a full day of these sports...” (Provider No 3)

1.2. Barriers to establishing vacation care and holiday programs

Participants reported that the main challenge to establishing vacation and holiday care services was making people aware these services existed. Also licensing – which was given for the duration of the contract - and reporting requirements for the Department of Education (DoE) were stated as being burdensome. YMCA (one of the stakeholders interviewed) offered vacation care on primary school premises; therefore, their main stakeholders were the DoE who conducted the tendering process, and the schools themselves. The presence of existing services also facilitated the establishment of holiday and vacation care programs and initially offered services at a discounted price.

“It’s quite a long process. And then it’s marketing the service, letting people know that it’s opening, going through the process, all the paperwork, policies, procedures, having a licensing visit that would come out and have a licensing visit to ensure that the service was suitable” (Provider No 2)

“...so they actually have to be registered as education care license services. So to be able to do that, we would need to meet the legislative requirements to do so....So to explore that option, we would need to make sure that we have adequate space. There’s a curriculum involved with having school-age children as well...” (WSU)

“...Vacation care could possibly be a little easier. Again, it’s still a licensed service, it’s not something that we could just pop up and have vacation care or there’s probably ways around it to have a vacation care program. Again, we need to make sure we’re adequately supervised, there is legislation around...And we could almost like, I’m thinking of something a little bit more

structured, like the YMCA kind of activities for school children at certain times, not a licensing thing...” (WSU)

“...lots of paperwork (for licensing).... We would need to make sure that we’ve got the proper management structure, which we do....someone would come and inspect the premises of the proposed spaces to make sure that it meets all the regulatory requirements, the space requirements, the ventilation, toilet requirements...” (WSU)

“..I have to tell you, it doesn't really matter what you've got for programs. But I do find that once the before and after school care was up and running, we got a much bigger uptake in the vacation care..” (Provider No 1)

“...the way we overcame that challenge (people not being aware of YMCA’s holiday programs) was we just offered the program at a really cheap price to start with....” (Provider No 3)

1.3. Benefits to parents and children of using vacation care / holiday programs

Participants reported that a central location was a benefit to parents. One provider would offer to pick the children up from a local school in the morning and parents would pick them up from the vacation care provider in the evening. If the service was provided on a licensed premise, parents would be eligible for government subsidy. Benefits for children included development of sport skills during holiday programs.

“...a lot of schools have an onsite vacation care. We go out and pick them up on the bus because we are obviously by the church...I guess I have had a lot of feedback from parents that they like the fact that children aren’t at school for the whole ten hours or whatever...They come somewhere different in some way, that’s different to the site, different activities, different faces...” (Provider No 1)

“...we are focusing more on developing the kids’ skills in the sport...” (Provider No 3)

1.4. Operation and staffing of vacation care and holiday programs

Participants reported that meeting staff to child ratios can be difficult, with most staff casually contracted and are university students (most of whom study nursing or primary teaching). It was also mentioned that a designated person for legal responsibility always had to be on site. There is also a requirement to have a responsible person for educational

matters on site who would be in charge of reporting to the DoE. Getting sufficient numbers of children to use these services had also been challenging.

"...staffing at ratios (1 per 12 children) is always a very hard balance because you need to have enough staff in order to facilitate the program properly...but then at the same time we need to minimise the staff from a financial point of view..." (Provider No 3)

"...You have a lot of uni students who are studying something completely different... so they come and work for a year or so while they are studying and then off like to pursue career.." (Provider No 2)

"...the challenge for me here has been the educational latest side of things, having someone who is trained in that area...There's a lot of reflective stuff that you have to do for the department, and that's their job to reflect on how the program works, what the kids want, what they do, how are we going to forward plan to engage the children in things that they enjoy.." (Provider No 1)

"...So it is difficult sometimes to get the numbers and some services to be able to operate effectively and efficiently..." (Provider No 2)

2. Before and after school care

2.1. Characteristics of before and after school care

One stakeholder interviewed offers before school care from 6.30 to 9.30am. They pick up the children from school, drop them back to the school after finishing the morning program, and pick them up again. Parents sign up for this service on an annual basis with the option of giving one week's notice for amending the ongoing booking. The other provider used the school premises for before and after school care.

"...So we start at six-thirty in the morning , which tends to be about half an hour earlier than the other local centers , which I think has been a benefit because we give parents a little bit extra time in the mornings..." (Provider No 1)

"..We have a couple that are operated or one that's operated on one of our premises and then others that are sort of off start a community center type locations , but they're all attached to local primary schools..." (Provider No 2)

2.2. Barriers to establishing before and after school care programs

Participants reported that opening costs and licensing requirements were a significant barrier to establishing before and after school care. Services also need to be marketed prior to opening. The in-house stakeholder felt that if *“WSU was to offer before and after school care, buses would need to be organised to pick up the children and drop them off.”* They also felt there might be an opportunity to use space on campus for this service.

“...I think we could have definitely marketed our business a lot more before we opened.... So I think if we open the centre, which is the intention, we will definitely do the marketing part for a couple of months before we even open just to really promote ourselves before the doors open...” (Provider No 1)

“..We have taken over existing services, but generally, because based on school property, you have to go through the licensing process, the contracts with the asset management unit. So whatever you did, you would need to do go through the Department of Education and do a licensing process that can take around 90 days. It’s quite a long process..” (Provider No 2)

“...challenge is that we have is obviously the licensing side, but that’s one hurdle that we could get through...is there a space on campus that we can actually look at converting...it might just be that we’ve got of couple of, you know, a space within the university that’s just not being used...” (WSU)

“...we would need to be able to go and collect those children or drop them off...” (WSU)

“...the biggest thing would be the cost of obviously staff and vehicles...” (WSU)

“...On the other side, once we or probably at the same time, we actually apply for what they call a license or approval rather under the family assistance law to actually receive or to be approved to receive money as a licensed service so parent can receive the childcare benefit...” (WSU)

2.3. Benefits to parents and children

Stakeholders said that early opening hours, a central location and a safe environment for children to play were the main benefits for parents and their children. Further, if the service is provided at a licensed premise, parents are eligible for government subsidies.

“...the actual location is central for sure, the safety aspects of where we are. We have a really lovely black dog space, I guess, but there's a lot of space for the kids where they can feel like the kids are safe in an environment is the same as all that sort of stuff...” (Provider No 1)

“...Now if it's a license or approved space so at least they get some sort of government subsidy and support...” (WSU)

2.4. Ongoing operation and staffing of before and after school care

One participant reported that the transportation of children could be stressful, mainly when the bus had a defect. Staffing was another issue because of split shifts – morning and afternoon shift – and most staff were university students and not always available during exam periods.

“...I find one of the biggest stresses are the buses. That can be quite stressful if something happens to the bus, which had happened once. Without that bus, I can't operate because I do go out and pick up the children...” (Provider No 1)

“..The only thing is that I find many uni students love Oosh, which is perfect for them. They go to uni through the day, they work morning and afternoons. And it works for me as well until they've got prep and then they say, oh , I've got teaching prep for a month so I can't work. So you sort of have to have quite a lot of staff on the books so that you can cover yourself too if you need to ...” (Provider No 1)

“... Well, I guess it's hard to think because last year was so different to everything. So, you know, there were a lot of challenges last year. Our occupancy levels are not amazing. And obviously, there's a lot of families that do need it, but you know, there's a lot of families that don't require it...” (Provider No 2)

“...So the requirements you would need is to have some staff with qualifications, working with children check obviously...” (Provider No 1)

“...And staffing for out of school hours is always very difficult. Well, you know, we do mainly operate before and after school care. So it's split shifts... You have a lot of uni students...” (Provider No 2)

“...there needs to be a transport option... We would need to be able to go and collect those children or drop them off...From an early learning perspective, we would be really happy to lend

support and be involved in that. If there's going to be the school care on campus, we want to be the ones..." (WSU)

3. Drop-in care

3.1. Characteristics of drop-in care

One service provider reported that drop-in care was offered 6 days a week from 9am to 12.30pm since these times were the most favourable to the parents. The service was also only offered in recreation centres operated by the provider. Pricing was dependent on facility and for some was part of a family membership.

".....we find that morning time frames is when it's most favourable...mom or dad can do their thing ...to enjoy their exercise by having the kids a safe environment... quite a large facility and it's working. It's a service that we offer for the community..."(Provider No 4)

"...So it's just a couple of dollars. So it's not part of our membership, but we have it there in place for the majority of our members so they can go to the gym..." (Provider No 4)

.. Some YMCA have previously had a part of the memberships...if you had a family memberships Creche is included..." (Provider No 4)

"...But we've got a ratio of having two staff on site. So depending on the ages of the children would depend upon what activities they're doing. It could be a bunch of toys...it could just be that the little ones sleep in there for an hour or so. So it really depends. So there's no real programming..." (Provider No 4)

3.2. Barriers to establishing drop-in services

Because the provider we interviewed was operating at council facilities, the prices for parents were low, which would impact financial viability. There are no licensing requirements for these services.

"...The challenge is that some of the small operations that may not have the viability of some of the larger programs can not wear that cost so we had to close the Creche, because it just really affected the viability of the facility..." (Provider No 4)

“...They are not licensed. So it is just the space, it can be a room...The tricky part would be to articulate that it was not part of the licensing. It's not part of our approved process. It was an extension to what that was. I would be a little hesitant to use our premises for that reason, and that would be something that I want to talk to some experts in the field around...” (WSU)

3.3. Ongoing operation and staffing of drop-in care

Regarding staffing requirements, first aid training, police check, and working with children checks are required. The organisation of staffing was mentioned as difficult as staff always needed to be on-site even if no children attended. Keeping occupancy levels high was difficult where drop-in care was offered. Smaller spaces for drop-in services would help reduce costs.

“...So just your first aid, CPR with children and police check...” (Provider No 4)

“...There's a couple of things you need to look at the size, how much space the physical space takes up, some creche we work at at the moment are extremely large. And if I look at the overall footprint of the facility, it probably doesn't require it...” (Provider No 4)

“...But challenge is just the viability....less attendance, less patrons overall, but you still you still got those costs to add those to staff there...” (Provider No 4)

“...We're always doing an acquisition. You're always trying get more families and always provide awareness of it, word of mouth...” (Provider No 4)

“...So we'll do things differently. I guess that depends upon what outcomes you are trying to achieve, if you just look to support staff...if your budget allows you take 50 k or 100k, whatever you've got, is a drop in the ocean because it's for staff wellbeing.....” (Provider No 4)

“...you could get volunteer students, not volunteer but you can pay them a nominal wage to babysit other people's children...” (WSU)

“...So we could possible look at extending the hours (childcare services currently offered at WSU but would be different to drop-in), introducing a session of kids so that people who aren't using the day time can still come in and use that. Anyone who using additional hours would pay for the sessional care as well. But those children, again, would be registered enrolled children..” (WSU)

Discussion

The survey results highlighted the needs and wishes of staff and students around childcare on campus. Parents do struggle with childcare. The availability of childcare was linked to turning up to work on time and the stress levels for working parents associated with fulfilling commitments and other work-related responsibilities. WSU parents indicated that they would put their children in drop-in and holiday care if such services would be available.

The insights from the interviews with the external stakeholders operating such services provided suggestions on how to expand the reputation of Western as an employer of choice for parents via the offering of additional childcare provisions. Operational challenges lie in maintaining long-term financial viability in meeting the supply and demand of such services. Fixed costs and, in particular, staffing were identified as a key challenge as specific staffing ratios need to be maintained to run drop in, vacation or holiday care. The external stakeholders also disclosed that it is not easy to attract and retain qualified staff. If established at WSU, university students could be hired as staff members for drop-in services.

The section below allows the positioning of WSU as compared to other Higher Education providers in NSW regarding the provision of childcare services that are offered to staff and students.

Childcare availability at other universities in NSW

Childcare services' availability to staff and parents at other universities in NSW is summarised in the table below. As can be noted, most universities provide the standardised classic-modelled day-care, similar to the Western Early Learning Centres. However, some universities provide additional innovative childcare services to cater to parents addressing the needs of working staff.

	Childcare centre	Before and after school care	Drop-in care	Vacation care	Holiday care
University of Sydney	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
	Four childcare centres Hours: 7.30am – 6.00pm Ages: 0 to 5 years				Programs: Sydney Uni Sport & Fitness (sports) University of Sydney museums (regularly hold children’s activities during school holidays) Hours: 9.00am - 3.00pm Age groups: 5 - 12, 12-17 years
University of New South Wales	Yes	No	No	No	No
	Three childcare centres Hours: 8.00am - 6.00pm Ages: 6 weeks to 6 years				
Australian Catholic University (ACU)	No	No	No	No	Yes
					ACU Football Holiday Clinic* Program duration: 3 days Age groups: 5-7, 8-10, 11-12 years <i>*held in 2020</i>
Charles Sturt	Yes	No	No	No	No
	Three childcare centres Hours: 8.00am – 6.00pm Ages: 0 to 5 years				
Macquarie University	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

	<p>Three childcare centres:</p> <p>Hours: 7.30am – 6.30pm Ages: 6 weeks to 5 years</p>		<p>At one centre during NSW public school terms</p> <p>Hours: 7.45am and 5.15pm Ages: 6 weeks to 5 years</p>	<p>At one centre</p> <p>Hours: 7.30am to 6.30pm</p>	<p>Programs: Junior Science Academy, Swim Clinics, Gymnastic Clinics</p> <p>Program duration: 1 day – 1 week (swimming)</p> <p>Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Science), 12.00pm – 3.00pm (Gymnastics)</p> <p>Ages: 3 to 17 years</p>
Southern Cross University	Yes	No	No	No	No
	<p>One childcare centre</p> <p>Hours: 7.30am to 6pm Ages: 4 months – 5 years</p>				
University of New England	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
	<p>One childcare centre</p> <p>Hours for full day care: 8.00am to 5.45pm Hours for sessional care: 8.00am to 1.30pm Afternoons from 1.30 to 5.45pm Ages: 0 to 5 years</p>			<p>Program: Recreational program including one excursion per week</p> <p>Hours: 8.00am - 5.45pm Ages: Kindergarten to year 6</p>	
University of Newcastle	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
	<p>4 childcare centres:</p> <p>- 3 childcare centres are community-based centres that are open to public and university</p>				<p>Program: SMART School (workshops include science, engineering)</p> <p>Program duration: 1 day</p> <p>Hours: 9.00am – 2.30pm Ages: 8 – 12 years</p>

	staff and students - 1 childcare centre is for children of students and staff only Hours: 7.00am – 6.00pm Ages: 0 to 5 years				
University of Technology Sydney	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
	2 childcare centres: Hours: 8.00am - 6.00pm Ages: 0 to 5 years				Program: Bright Futures* (workshops include engineering, architecture, communication, puppeteering, forensics, creativity, technology) Program duration: 2 - 4 days Hours: 9.15am to 4.30pm Ages: year 4 – 7 <i>*was available until 2019 before Covid-19</i>
University of Wollongong	No	No	No	No	Yes
					Program: Learning Labs Presenters Hours: 8.30am – 2.30pm/3.30pm Program duration: 1-2 days Age groups: Year 1 & 2, Year 3-6, Year 7-10

We identified that many NSW universities are offering school holiday programs that are aligned to the University’s expertise. None of these cover the Western Sydney region; hence WSU could position itself in a niche market.

Parents do struggle with childcare availability and having such services in-house would assist in juggling the family-work-life balance. There is a case for Western to formally explore the possibility of providing drop in and/or holiday care. Such innovative

approach would build Western's brand, retain parents, improve productivity and absenteeism and support parents in the new hybrid model of flexible work arrangements.

Conclusion

The COVID 19 pandemic environment has increased stress and workload for working parents. Planning ahead for full return to campus, in the near future, offers an opportunity for Western to brand itself as a family friendly university and an employer of choice for parents. The recommendations in this report are based directly on the project findings and can inform Western on potential additional childcare alternatives in response to identified needs of staff and student parents.

Operational insights from external stakeholders highlight the possibilities for expanded on-campus childcare facilities that can enrich co-learning opportunities for children through their greater inclusion on campus. Operational barriers, challenges and benefits have also been considered.

The provision of additional flexible campus-based childcare support, and vacation care options, will enhance the university's reputation as a supportive environment for parents and children. It also enhances retention of staff who recognise the benefits of such a family-friendly environment. This project has highlighted potential opportunities to harness a competitive advantage in the Higher Education sector, when compared to other tertiary education providers in NSW, with an expansion of the provisions for flexible childcare and vacation care options.

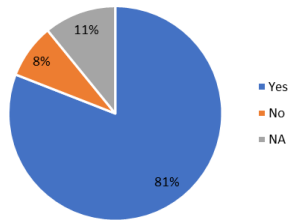
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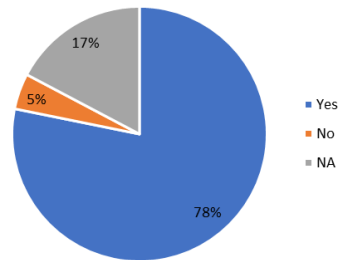
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Appendix A: Participant characteristics

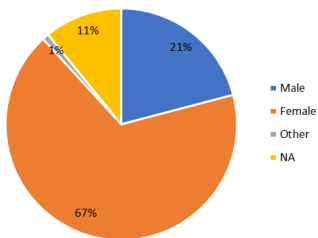
Married or living with a partner (N=110)



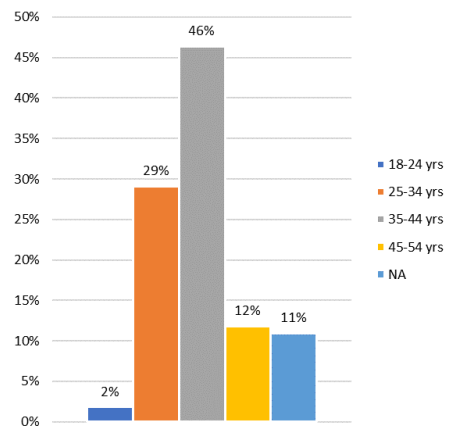
Is partner or spouse employed? (N=110)



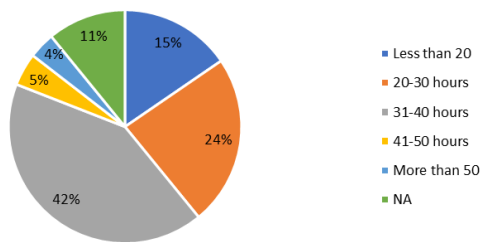
Gender (N=110)



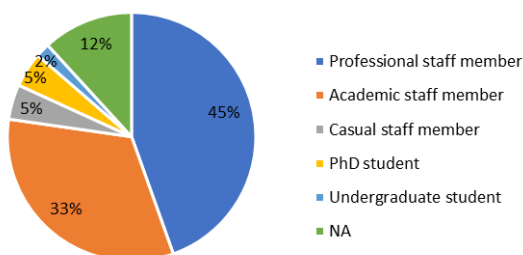
Age (N=110)



Hours spent on Western Campuses each week (Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) (N=110)



Employment at Western Sydney University (N=110)



Appendix B: Questions around childcare service

Table 1. How likely participants would use childcare services (n=110)

	Very likely	Likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	Never	NA
Childcare centre	27	20	17	8	9	10	19
Externally provided childcare organised via Western	22	24	25	13	7	9	3
On-site emergency back-up care	51	29	11	2	2	6	3
Drop in care	41	33	8	5	5	7	2
Holiday and vacation program	46	36	6	1	5	9	3
Afterschool program	36	20	9	10	9	17	4

Figure 1. Usefulness of childcare services to children (N=110)

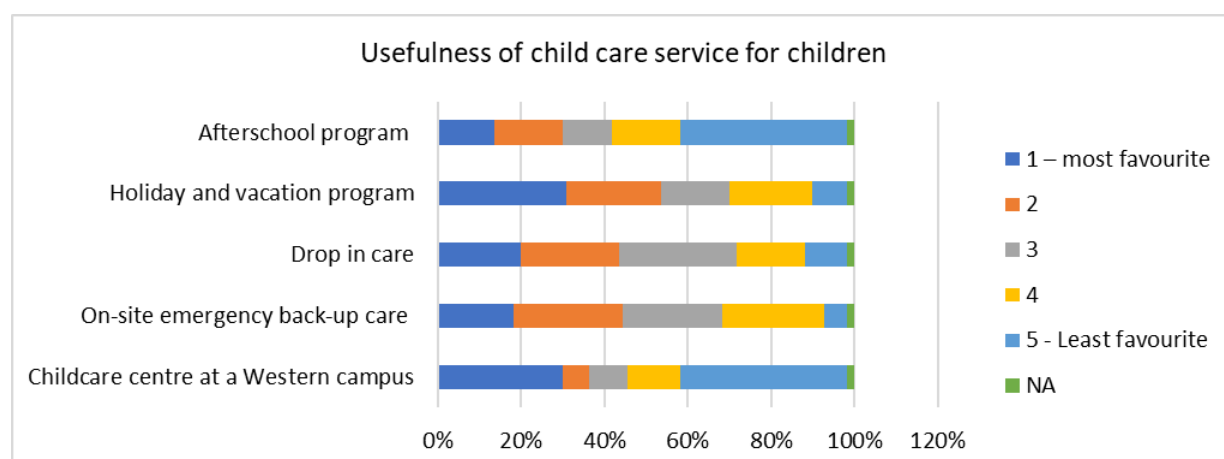


Table 2. Usefulness of childcare services to children (N=110)

	1 – most favourite	2	3	4	5 - Least favourite	NA
Childcare centre at a Western campus	33	7	10	14	44	2
On-site emergency back-up care	20	29	26	27	6	2
Drop in care	22	26	31	18	11	2
Holiday and vacation program	34	25	18	22	9	2
Afterschool program on or near campus	15	18	13	18	44	2

Figure 2.

Times changed child care arrangement in past year

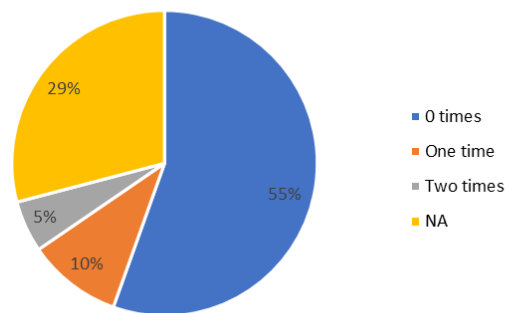
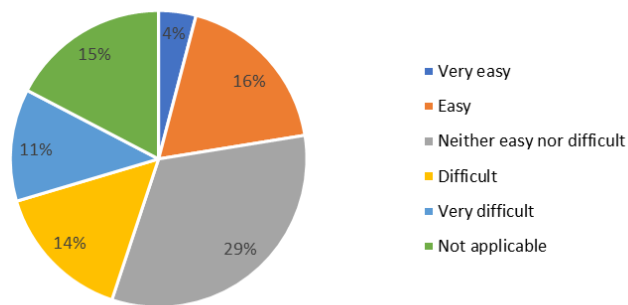


Figure 3.

Difficulty to find child care arrangement



Problems participants reported in arranging for childcare:

“I have briefly looked prior to having my baby and the cost and trying to find a balance of location between mine and my partner’s work is hard. The waitlists are also quite long in my small town”

“organising transport from school to childcare arrangement”

“long waiting list”

“Did not have additional days available when needed”